

Attorney General Greg Zoeller
Statement for U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging Field Hearing
“Trust Your Instincts? Tools to Empower Seniors to Identify Scams and Fraud”
Indiana State Fair, Indianapolis
August 5, 2014

Good morning Senator Donnelly and thank you for convening this important hearing to gather information about tools Hoosier Seniors and their families can utilize to protect themselves from harmful fraud and scams.

Every day, Hoosier Seniors lose money to scam artists – online and at their front door. My office is working on this issue by tackling it from several fronts.

Seniors are often targeted because of their vulnerability and financial resources.....After hearing from many families about how their elderly parents were approached and felt forced to give money but got nothing in return, I worked with the Indiana legislature to address this problem.

In 2013, we enhanced our consumer protections to stiffen civil penalties against those found guilty of financially exploiting Hoosiers 60-years and older. Since that change, we have received 3,067 complaints from senior consumers. These complaints include home improvement fraud, where unnecessary work was contracted, often at inflated prices, financial fraud, and just outright scams designed to separate seniors from their money. We have already taken action against companies that targeted our seniors and sadly expect we will have others in the future as our investigations conclude. This new statute closed a loophole to address a situation where seniors feel intimidated or coerced into turning over their property or paying for a service they did not want.

Over the years we have developed the **Fraud Alert Program**, offering another tool for Hoosiers to stay aware of the latest frauds to avoid falling victim to scams. Consumers can sign up via my website – to receive fraud alerts by email or text message. (www.in.gov/attorneygeneral) The consumer alert program works as an early warning system. Once you sign up, you will be alerted of frauds believed to pose a threat to Hoosiers with links to tips on how to avoid the scams and what to do if victimized.

Also, our **Outreach Services team** travels the state conducting workshops that teaching Hoosiers about scams and the tactics fraudsters use so that our citizens will know not to send money to strangers. There is very little we can do to recover lost funds for a victim of a cross-border scam, but we can educate them before they are contacted and empower them to make the right decisions to avoid becoming victimized. **All of our programs are**

free. I encourage anyone listening to contact our office to schedule one of these seminars in their community. (phone number 317/234-6668).

The operation of scams today is increasingly more sophisticated causing millions of Americans and thousands of Hoosiers to fall victim every year. The office tracks fraud trends across the country on behalf of consumers because very few scams actually originate in Indiana. The office scans and monitors frauds from coast to coast to identify which pose the greatest threat to Hoosiers.

The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division coordinates with the Federal Trade Commission, National Association of Attorneys General, Better Business Bureau and other consumer protection agencies to gain knowledge of scams occurring in other states in order to provide quick notice of the potential threat to Hoosiers.

We also offer **an ID Theft Prevention Toolkit**. This kit was designed by our office to not only assist victims through the process of correcting their records, but to assist consumers in taking steps to minimize the risk of identity theft. Among other things, the toolkit allows you to easily keep an accurate inventory of the contents of your purse or wallet so you can quickly contact creditors if the information is ever lost or stolen. The toolkit also contains other useful tools that can help protect you from becoming an identity theft victim. (www.indianaconsumer/idtheft)

In addition, you can place your phone number on **The Do Not Call List**, which is for residential, wireless or VOIP telephone numbers or prepaid wireless numbers used primarily in Indiana. Registration is provided free of charge to Indiana residents. Registrations on the Indiana Do Not Call list do not expire.

There is information on our website too about **placing a security freeze** on your credit reports, which can potentially block an identity thief from opening a new account or obtaining credit in your name. A credit freeze keeps new creditors from accessing your credit report without your permission. If you activate a credit freeze, an identity thief cannot take out new credit in your name, even if the thief has your Social Security number or other personal information, because creditors cannot access your credit report.

Any Indiana resident can request a credit freeze free of charge.

The types of scams we see are varied, but consistent in the theme – tricking you into sending money after preying upon your vulnerabilities....family and promises of windfalls..... We see many seniors falling victim to the **Grandparents Scam**. This is when someone impersonates a grandchild and claims to need money to be bailed out

of jail or to pay a repair bill on a wrecked car. Never send money to someone claiming to be a relative. Beware, this is not only a phone scam, but is also perpetuated through FaceBook and other online social media sites.

We also see the **Fake Lotteries and Sweepstakes**.

Follow these two tips – **First** -- A legitimate contest will never require you to send money to claim a prize. Whether it is for taxes, handling fees, custom fees, vehicle registration – you will never have to send funds from your personal accounts to get the prize. **Second**, it is illegal for you to play or win a contest in another country. Unless you are standing on the soil in that country at the time of the contest, you can neither play it nor win it.

The bottom line is – DO NOT SEND MONEY TO STRANGERS!

Scams are one of the most visible and can be one of the most devastating issues my office deals with – but seniors across the state should also be aware of the increasing theft of prescription drugs.....family members, neighbors, friends and strangers may target your medicine cabinet. Be aware of the prescription drugs you have in your home and get rid of any expired or unused medicines that might attract those who are addicted or misuse these drugs. For your safety, you can join in drug take back programs twice a year in Indiana. Some pharmacies are now offering a take back program called Yellow Jugs, Old Drugs – ask your pharmacist if your pharmacy participates. The Indiana prescription Drug task force is working on ways to reduce the epidemic of prescription drug use in Indiana....as a leader in the number of pharmacy thefts due to addiction, it is imperative we all focus on how to attack this difficult problem raging across Indiana.

Locally, Indiana has a treasure for our Seniors in county TRIAD organizations. In closing, I need to applaud the individuals and organizations that support local TRIADs – When I took office in 2009, there were a handful of organizations – now we have 21 groups serving 23 counties. TRIAD is key in helping to prevent fraud and

other crimes against seniors. An attorney general staff member has been designated to work with existing TRIAD groups and to help other interested counties start TRIAD programs.

Thank you, Sen. Donnelly, for your tireless efforts to protect and serve Hoosier Seniors and thank you for this opportunity to speak about the Attorney General's efforts in this area as well.

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